



To: NJSIAA Program Review Committee

From: Tony Maselli, Chief Operating Officer

Date: October 10, 2025

RE: Use of Backstroke Ledges in Swimming

Proposal

The NFHS has approved the use of backstroke ledges (BSL) in high school swimming. We propose a phased approach for the implementation of backstroke ledges to enhance safety, fairness, and consistency across all competitions. This plan addresses both regular season and state tournament participation, gradually increasing accessibility while maintaining standardized procedures. This proposal will begin with the 2025-26 winter season, and the guidelines have been included for your reference.

Key reasons for the proposal

1. **Safety Enhancement:** BSLs reduce the risk of backstroke start injuries by providing swimmers with a secure foothold, leading to safer, more controlled starts. This is particularly important for younger or less experienced swimmers.
2. **Equity and Fairness:** The phased implementation ensures that all swimmers in a race have equal opportunity to use ledges when available, while still allowing individuals or teams to opt out without impacting competitors.
3. **Standardization:** Requiring all BSLs to come from the same manufacturer and setting clear facility and procedural standards ensures consistency across venues, maintaining fairness in competition.
4. **Gradual Integration:** The multi-year approach allows schools and facilities to adapt to the use of ledges, including logistical considerations such as setup, removal, and training swimmers to use them effectively.
5. **Compliance with NFHS Standards:** The plan aligns with NFHS regulations, maintaining the integrity of competition while adopting modern safety equipment.
6. **Inclusivity Across Competition Levels:** By expanding BSL usage from optional mutual agreements in the regular season to full implementation at state tournaments, the plan promotes safe competition at all levels while respecting individual and team preferences.

Rationale

The proposed phased use of backstroke ledges (BSLs) aims to enhance swimmer safety, fairness, and performance consistency in high school competitions. Backstroke starts are among the most injury-prone aspects of competitive swimming, and ledges provide a stable platform that reduces slip hazards, improves leverage, and minimizes the risk of shoulder and back injuries.

Backstroke Ledge (BSL) Usage Guidelines

2025–2026

Regular Season:

- Mutual agreement between schools is required to utilize backstroke ledges if the facility is equipped with them. The mutual agreement is all lanes or no lanes.

State Tournament:

- Backstroke ledges will be used at the Meet of Champions for both the prelims and finals. Individual swimmers may choose not to use them; however, that will not deny the other swimmers from using them. Backstroke ledges are not permitted at any other tournament round except for the Meet of Champions.

2026–2027

Regular Season:

- No mutual agreement between schools is required to utilize backstroke ledges if the facility is equipped with them. Individuals and or the team may choose not to use them; however, that will not deny the other school from using them.

State Tournament:

- Backstroke ledges will be used at the Meet of Champions for both the prelims and finals. Individual swimmers may choose not to use them; however, that will not deny the other swimmers from using them.
- Backstroke ledges will be used at the team sectionals, semifinals, and finals. Individuals and/or the team may choose not to use them; however, that will not deny the other school from using them.

2027–2028

Regular Season:

- No mutual agreement between schools is required to utilize backstroke ledges if the facility is equipped with them. Individuals and/or the team may choose not to use them, however that will not deny the other school from using them.

State Tournament:

- Backstroke ledges will be used at the Meet of Champions for both the prelims and finals. Individual swimmers may choose not to use them, however that will not deny the other swimmers from using them.
- Backstroke ledges will be used at the team sectionals, semifinals, and finals. Individuals and/or the team may choose not to use them; however, that will not deny the other school from using them.
- Backstroke ledges may be utilized at all preliminary rounds. Individual schools may choose not to use them; however, that will not deny the other school from using them.

Important Notes

- The facility must provide and agree to utilize the ledges.
- All facilities may choose which type of BSL to use provided they are from the same manufacturer.
- All BSL must be used as the manufacture intended and must not be altered in any way.
- Under no circumstances may a school provide and use their own backstroke ledges.
- Each school must have a clear procedure established for inserting and removing the ledges from the pool. This is not the facilities responsibility.
- Pools must maintain a 6-foot water depth, measured from the starting end wall to at least 16 feet-5 inches (5 meters) from that wall to be eligible for backstroke ledges.